

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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MARCH 9, 2023

Washingtonian Dana Hyde to be buried in Israel following tragic plane accident

The lawyer and former White House official remembered as someone 'driven by the desire to help others'

By Gabby Deutch

Before Dana Hyde died last week as a result of turbulence experienced on a business jet, she was at the peak of a Washington career. The 55-year-old lawyer was a co-chair of the Partnership for an Inclusive Economy at the Aspen Institute and had served in numerous government jobs over the years.

But when Hyde arrived in Washington in 1989 soon after her graduation from the University of California Los Angeles, she didn't yet have any of those credentials. Her first job in the nation's capital was, like many other young idealists hoping to get their foot in the door in Washington, an internship.

"Even at that young age and with no work experience, she was just an extraordinarily brilliant, capable, committed person who had all the right values," said Ester Kurz, who

hired Hyde for that first internship at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. "In all the many jobs she had in Washington, and she had many, she was always driven by the desire to help others." (Kurz retired from AIPAC in 2021 after 39 years.)

After two years as a legislative assistant at AIPAC, Hyde, who grew up in Oregon, worked on Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign and later in his White House. After getting a law degree from Georgetown, she served as counsel to the congressional 9/11 Commission. She spent time both in private practice and in government, including as CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a Senate-confirmed position.

"She was so effective and such a valuable member of anybody's team, and that really came across today at the memorial service,"

said Kurz.

Hyde was flying with her husband and son back from visiting schools in New England when their jet, which is owned by her husband's company, experienced unexpected strong turbulence.

"Dana was the best person I ever knew. She was a wonderful mother to our boys and she was accomplished professionally," her husband Jonathan Chambers wrote in an email to colleagues. "She loved and was beloved."

Hyde's funeral on Wednesday took place at Temple Micah in Washington and drew more than 200 people, among them National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and former Treasury Secretary Jack Lew. Hyde will be buried in Israel today. ♦

MARCH 8, 2023

McKinsey says it canceled sponsorship of Arab Conference at Harvard

The consulting giant was a major corporate sponsor of the weekend gathering before learning of the antisemitic views of one of the speakers

By Gabby Deutch

The consulting giant McKinsey & Company announced on Monday that it “stepped away” from last weekend’s Arab Conference at Harvard after learning of antisemitic views of one of its speakers.

The firm’s statement followed a *Jewish Insider* report from the McKinsey-sponsored conference, where speakers including former Women’s March leader Linda Sarsour and Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) urged students to protest “apartheid” Israel.

“When we learned late last week that a speaker at an event our recruiting team was sponsoring at Harvard University had a history of anti-Semitic comments, we immediately stepped away from the conference, canceled our in-person

recruiting meeting and withdrew two speakers from the program,” the statement said. “We condemn anti-Semitism in all its forms and stand for inclusion and tolerance everywhere.”

As of Tuesday evening, McKinsey is still listed as a “close circle sponsor” of the conference — the highest level of sponsorship — on the conference website. The recruiting session still appears on the schedule, and a page listing the time and place of the McKinsey recruiting session, which was set to take place on Sunday, is still active. (A revised schedule sent to attendees on Sunday morning did not list the McKinsey session. JI reached out to conference organizers to ask whether the session took place, but they did not respond.)

McKinsey’s statement does not specify which speaker the company was referencing, and a spokesperson declined to comment further. DJ Carella, the firm’s global director of media relations and corporate communications, did not respond to questions about the speaker or why the organization was still listed as a sponsor on the conference website.

In a Tuesday night email to students and donors, Harvard Hillel’s executive director, Rabbi Jonah Steinberg, lamented Sarsour’s message that Zionists are trying to silence her and “our Arab peers and colleagues at Harvard.” Jewish students at Harvard, Steinberg wrote, experience such accusations “as painful and prejudiced.” ♦

MARCH 9, 2023

Bill de Blasio presses the ‘progressive case for Israel’ at Harvard

Speaking to Harvard Law students, the ex-NYC mayor seeks to dispel ‘horrible stereotype’ that progressives don’t support Israel, even as he fears for the ‘future of democracy in Israel’

By Matthew Kassel

Bill de Blasio, the former mayor of New York City, wasn’t sure what to expect when, a week ago, he met with a diverse group of students at Harvard Law School to defend his long-held belief that

progressive values are compatible with, if not contingent upon, maintaining support for Israel.

The topic of the event was sure to be met with at least some resistance, particularly

on a campus like that of Harvard University, where instances of anti-Israel activism have drawn national scrutiny in recent months.

But de Blasio said he was largely encouraged by the response to his talk, billed

as “The Progressive Case for Israel” and held in a classroom at Harvard’s Wasserstein Hall on Tuesday, Feb. 28. “We had a real dialogue, and folks were struck by that,” de Blasio told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. “There was actually a sustained discussion.”

Even as the tenor of the discussion “was at times heated” and “at times a little tense,” he acknowledged, “it was still civil in the scheme of things.”

“I heard views I would call left-wing, views I would call right-wing, views I would call pro-Israel and views I would call pro-Palestine,” de Blasio recounted. “I heard a range in the course of an hour, and no one left the room, no one walked out. People stuck with it. I actually saw some hope in that.”

De Blasio, who recently concluded a semester-long fellowship at Harvard, was asked to speak at the university by the Alliance for Israel at Harvard and the Harvard Jewish Law Students Association, which co-hosted the event.

“Bill de Blasio served for two terms as mayor of New York City, which has the highest Jewish population of any city across the globe,” Marc Heinrich and Ari Spitzer, co-presidents of the Harvard Jewish Law Students Association, wrote in a joint email to JI. “We were honored to co-host Mayor de Blasio and hear him speak to the greater Harvard Law School community about how New York’s Jewish community impacted his core values as a public servant.”

As a veteran Democrat who built strong relationships with Orthodox Jewish leaders in Brooklyn while in office, de Blasio, 61, said he was eager to reflect on such experiences at the Harvard event. “I talked about meeting Holocaust survivors, and, very powerfully, one woman who showed me and my family the tattoo on her arm from Auschwitz,” he said, recalling “a shock of recognition that the violence associated with antisemitism was so real and so recent and, horribly, continuing all over the world.”

“That’s one of the reasons that, to me, we cannot underestimate *for a moment* the challenges Jewish people face in this world, and why the State of Israel is absolutely needed as a refuge,” de Blasio insisted. “That does not negate other legitimate issues that need to be addressed, and it certainly doesn’t negate the valid concerns

of Palestinians. But my central thesis is, progressives are supposed to stand up for oppressed peoples.”

The invitation to speak at Harvard, de Blasio elaborated, was also an opportunity to “dispel” what he described as “a horrible stereotype that suggests that some vast number of progressives are not supportive of the State of Israel.”

“I think that’s just absolutely inaccurate and based on no evidence, and I think it’s important to bear witness,” he added. “There’s a lot of us who support the State of Israel. Many of us don’t agree with the Netanyahu government, but we support the State of Israel.”

Speaking with JI, de Blasio emphasized that he is troubled by the direction of Israel’s right-wing governing coalition led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose effort to advance a controversial judicial overhaul has drawn mass protests across the Jewish state. “I think the actions of the Netanyahu government are extremely worrisome,” he said. “I am worried about the future of democracy in Israel.”

He clarified, however, that such concerns, which have recently been echoed by a growing number of Democratic leaders, are consistent with a pro-Israel outlook. “You can still love Israel and support the State of Israel but acknowledge it has a democracy problem,” he said, “just like I love America and acknowledge my own country has a democracy problem.”

“The notion that sometimes people are accused of antisemitism if they disagree with the current Israeli government is obviously outlandish and needs to be called out,” de Blasio added. “That came up in the dialogue, and I said, ‘I know so many leaders who are deeply respectful of the Jewish experience and happen to disagree with the Israeli government, and there’s no contradiction.’ I think that *has* to be understood better.”

Last summer, de Blasio raised some eyebrows when he dropped his support for AIPAC during a brief run for an open congressional seat in Lower Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn. His objection to the pro-Israel lobbying group, which he had long defended, was that its political arm had recently targeted a fellow progressive Democrat, Nina Turner, in a Cleveland-area House primary.

During that election, Jewish voters in Cleveland had expressed reservations over Turner’s approach to Israel, which drew attack ads from pro-Israel groups including a super PAC affiliated with AIPAC.

In an interview with JI last June, de Blasio defended his decision to denounce AIPAC, noting that he did not agree with all of Turner’s Middle East policy positions but remained loyal to her as a friend. The New York Democrat, who visited Israel during his second year as mayor, maintained that he “can simultaneously be a very proud progressive and a very proud supporter of Israel,” adding, “I don’t see any contradiction.”

The recent event at Harvard was, in many ways, a continuation of that argument, as he reiterated his support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and underscored his opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel, among other things.

His remarks came days before Harvard’s Arab Conference, where an outspoken supporter of BDS who has been accused of antisemitism, the former Women’s March leader Linda Sarsour, delivered a keynote address in which she exhorted students to protest “apartheid” Israel. The consulting giant McKinsey & Company, which sponsored the event, announced on Monday that it had “stepped away” from the conference after learning that one speaker, whom it did not identify by name, “had a history of antisemitic comments.”

The weekend speech from Sarsour followed other examples in which debates over Israel have stirred controversy at Harvard. Last year, the editorial board of its student newspaper, the *Harvard Crimson*, endorsed the BDS movement, drawing a sharp rebuke from the student president of Harvard Hillel, among others. (The paper’s news team covered the Blasio event last week.) In 2016, third-year law student Husam El-Qoulaq, invoked an antisemitism trope during a question-and-answer period at an event with former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.

In January, meanwhile, the Harvard Kennedy School said it would grant a fellowship to the former executive director of Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth,

after the school's dean had reportedly vetoed its initial offer amid concerns over Roth's apparent hostility to Israel.

"I think, in academia, it's important to respect and hear a diversity of voices," de Blasio said of the Roth dustup. "That's my only comment on that."

As a visiting fellow at the Institute of Politics at the Harvard Kennedy School and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health this past semester, de Blasio said he had been invited to speak with Jewish and Muslim groups but never had the chance to engage with students together, as he did last week.

"It's great to speak to people of different viewpoints separately, but it's especially powerful to bring everyone in the room and be like, 'let's hash it out,'" he told JI. "I don't mean that's like, you know, *kumbaya*. I don't mean it's going to be easy. But if we're not devoted to that kind of open dialogue and

having the tough conversations, then we are accepting of an absolutely unacceptable status quo."

During the question-and-answer session of the discussion, de Blasio, who is now a visiting fellow at New York University and American University in Washington, D.C., said he heard from both Palestinian and Muslim students who voiced what he characterized as "very real concerns" about the content of his argument.

"What I tried to do was listen and give them the chance to get their whole statement or question out, even if I disagreed with some elements of it, and answer as someone who respects the Muslim community," he explained. "Beginning with the atmosphere of, I believe, respect and willingness to listen, doesn't mean watering down my views. But I do think encouraging dialogue, being willing to take tough questions, is valuable unto itself."

One student attendee, Ben, a second-year law student at Harvard who declined to share his last name, affirmed the former mayor's assessment in an email shared with JI. "I couldn't get over the diverse perspectives that we got to hear from: Israelis, Jewish progressives, right-wing evangelicals, pro-Palestine activists," he said in a message sent to the Harvard Jewish Law Students Association after the event. "It was intense, exciting and thought-provoking."

De Blasio, for his part, said he considers it a minor if ultimately meaningful achievement that the conversation did not devolve into a shouting match or result in a walk-out.

"This is a microcosm of what we have to do for our country and for the Middle Eastern region in general," he suggested. "It was a very, very small, localized first step at Harvard, but it was better than never being in the room together." ♦

MARCH 9, 2023

Senate Republicans claim Department of Education has funded antisemitic programs on college campuses

'We write with grave concern that the Department of Education, over the course of decades, has been allowing taxpayer-funded antisemitism to take place on college campuses,' 15 senators said

By Marc Rod

Senate Republicans raised concerns in a new letter sent yesterday that the Department of Education has for years funded antisemitic programs on college campuses with taxpayer money, and accused the department of having failed to enforce federal law.

"We write with grave concern that the Department of Education, over the course of decades, has been allowing taxpayer-funded antisemitism to take place on college campuses throughout the United States," 15 senators wrote in a letter to

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. "We are especially concerned the Department of Education is failing to enforce a Higher Education Act (HEA), Title VI requirement that college programs that receive federal funds must 'reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views.'"

The letter was signed by Sens. Jim Risch (R-ID), Mike Crapo (R-ID), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Ted Budd (R-NC), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), John Cornyn (R-TX), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), Rick Scott (R-FL), Mike Braun (R-IN), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Marco Rubio (R-FL),

John Hoeven (R-ND), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Josh Hawley (R-MO) and Ted Cruz (R-TX). The DOE did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The letter alleges that many of the Near East and Middle East-focused programs that receive DOE funding disproportionately focus their curricula and public output on criticizing Israel, in a way the senators say meets the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism.

"The obsessive negative focus on Israel

and the Jewish people is rampant on college campuses throughout the United States,” the senators claim. “Because of the widespread antisemitism taking place on college campuses, many Jewish and pro-Israel students no longer feel safe.”

They add that “a core reason college campuses are plagued by antisemitism is because professors who teach the curriculum indoctrinate students with anti-Israel bias and viewpoints.” The letter cites statistics linking anti-Israel viewpoints among

professors to higher rates of antisemitic and anti-Israel attacks on students on campus.

The lawmakers also say that the DOE “does not evaluate Title VI applicants’ statements regarding diverse perspectives.”

The senators request that, by April 28, the Department of Education provide information on the extent to which schools have used federal funds to support speakers and programs meeting the IHRA definition of antisemitism and whether and how the department has evaluated the Title VI

viewpoint-diversity statements.

The lawmakers ask for an estimate of “how many colleges and universities... have become unsafe for Jewish students” and how the department can “ensure Jewish students have demonstrated reasons to feel safe on campus.” They also request a plan for ensuring that “programs and professors on college and university campuses receiving HEA Title VI funding are in compliance with federal requirements requiring diverse perspectives.” ♦

MARCH 8, 2023

Jewish groups urge Supreme Court to change religious workplace accommodation standards

A range of communal organizations say the high court should rule in Groff v. DeJoy that employers must adhere to a more stringent standard in rejecting religious accommodations

By Marc Rod

More than a dozen Jewish groups filed or joined briefs last week urging the Supreme Court to reevaluate its past precedent on religious accommodations in the workplace and make it more difficult for employers to deny accommodations. The organizations are weighing in on the *Groff v. DeJoy* case set to be argued later this term.

They’re supporting Gerald Groff, a former mailman and evangelical Christian who refused to work on Sundays in observance of his Sabbath. The U.S. Postal Service disciplined Groff and threatened to terminate him, as his supervisors were unable to fill all of his weekend shifts, and Groff quit his job. The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the USPS, finding that Groff’s requested accommodations had strained resources, burdened his co-workers and detrimentally impacted morale.

The case, and the Jewish groups that

have filed briefs, ultimately seek to revisit the 1977 ruling in *Trans World Airlines v. Hardison*, where the Supreme Court ruled that employers are only required to accommodate their employees religious beliefs if doing so does not impose more than a minimal, or “de minimis cost,” to the employer.

Several of the groups involved argue that this is a misinterpretation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, amended in 1972 to require employers to provide accommodations unless doing so causes an “undue hardship.” Some Jewish groups have sought for decades to revisit *Hardison*, and three sitting justices have indicated in recent years an interest in overturning the precedent. *Groff v. DeJoy* is the first such case the current court has taken up.

Groups involved include the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Orthodox Union, Zionist

Organization of America, Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs (COLPA), Jewish Coalition for Religious Liberty (JCRL), Agudath Israel of America and a series of other groups largely representing the Orthodox community.

Many of the Jewish groups that have weighed in on the *Groff* case are urging the court to raise the standard for “undue hardship,” potentially bringing the definition in line with its interpretation in other legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, which contains similar language. They say that doing so is especially important for protecting minority religious rights.

Nathan Diamant, the executive director of the Orthodox Union Advocacy Center, told *Jewish Insider* that Orthodox Jews in particular have struggled to obtain accommodations in the workplace,

including observing Shabbat, wearing religious clothing, maintaining traditional grooming styles and taking time to pray during the workday.

“Under the current legal standard, which is basically that an employer can pretty much decide for any reason not to provide an accommodation, which is not [a] standard that allows Orthodox Jews to have the full range of opportunities in the workplace,” Diamant said.

The “de minimis” standard is “completely different than what it requires in other cases involving other groups,” Brandeis Center founder Kenneth Marcus told JI. “We’ve argued for a more even-handed or equitable treatment.”

Advocates say that the “de minimis” interpretation is inconsistent with both the language of the statute and Congress’ explicit intent in amending existing civil rights laws to include protections for religious accommodations, providing few real protections for Jewish workers.

The current standard “leaves observant Jews — and other religious employees — at risk of having to make a choice that no one should be forced to make: upholding their religious beliefs and observances or keeping their jobs,” Susan Tuchman, the director of ZOA’s Center for Law and Justice, told JI.

Employers have previously successfully claimed that even record keeping to track accommodations and shift swaps constituted more than a “de minimis” burden, according to the AJC’s chief legal officer, Marc Stern.

“That’s not a credible argument, yet it’s credible under a ‘de minimis’ standard,” Stern said. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, Stern explained, denying accommodations “requires a showing of substantiality, that there’s a real impediment, a serious cost, to the employer.” He and AJC support establishing the same standard for religious accommodations.

“‘Undue hardship’ should be given its plain and ordinary meaning — significant difficulty or expense,” Tuchman said. “That’s how it’s been defined not only in the ADA, but also in other federal statutes.”

Some of the briefs also say that the *Hardison* ruling makes it so difficult for Jews to challenge decisions denying them accommodations in the workplace that it

facilitates and provides cover for workplace antisemitism.

Marcus said that, under the *Hardison* standard, it is “extremely hard to prove” that an employer is “negatively disposed to Jewish people or specifically Orthodox Jews” when they are denied accommodations.

“Whether they are merely being unreasonable or whether they’re actually anti-Jewish, we would never be able to prove,” he said. “This gives them an opportunity to say no to their Jewish employees, and sometimes drive Jewish employees out. And we would never be able to prove what their motivation was.”

Overall, Marcus added, the Brandeis Center is seeing quickly increasing numbers of cases of workplace antisemitism, and “it’s going to be really important to make sure that Jewish workers have the tools that they need to prevent unequal treatment. This is one of the tools that they will need.”

“Grumbling” in workplaces by people who “[harbor] hardcore antisemitic beliefs” can also effectively become a “heckler’s veto” to accommodations for Jews in the workplace, Stern said. He also noted that, under the current standard, attorneys have sometimes found themselves in the position of warning prospective clients that they faced low chances of success in workplace discrimination cases, while risking making themselves pariahs in the workplace.

“If we had a higher standard, we would not be giving that advice,” Stern said. A victory at the Supreme Court would also, he argued, lead workplaces to take religious discrimination more seriously and give it more attention, commensurate with other forms of discrimination.

The current Supreme Court has been highly favorable to religious liberty claims in the past, and multiple justices on the panel have explicitly stated their interest in the past in revisiting the *Hardison* decision, making many advocates hopeful for a positive result in this case.

“I have a generally positive feeling,” Howard Slugh, the general counsel for JCRL, said. “The court no longer thinks that any kind of positive interaction between the government and religious people constitutes a violation of the Establishment Clause. And the text of Title VII is very clear.”

Nathan Lewin, a constitutional attorney

who authored the COLPA brief, helped craft the underlying statute and argued in the original *Hardison* case said there might also be reason to hope the court’s liberals ultimately side with *Groff* as well as the conservative wing that is more reliably favorable to religious liberty cases.

“Justices [Thurgood] Marshall and [William] Brennan, who are after all, viewed very favorably, idolized, by the current liberals, dissented in *Hardison*,” he noted. “I don’t think this is a case that should be decided six to three or five to four. This is a case in which the court unanimously — all nine justices — should agree that the ‘de minimis’ language and the holding in *Hardison* were both wrong.”

But AJC’s Stern noted that a decision by the court to strengthen requirements for religious accommodations would not necessarily guarantee *Groff* a win. Given the particular facts of his case, Stern explained, the justices may find that the USPS would still be unable to reasonably accommodate *Groff* under a higher standard, or they could remand the case to a lower court to reevaluate using a new standard.

And ADL’s National Civil Rights Counsel Karen Levit noted that “this is a court that isn’t always friendly to employees but has been friendly to religion. And that makes it a little difficult to predict.” OU’s Diamant noted that the business community is likely to file briefs in favor of the USPS, arguing that raising the standard would impose “terrible costs on business owners.”

Groff marks a rare instance in which some groups, including the ADL and AJC, are wading into the court’s religion-related litigation. In one recent case about public funding of religious schooling, the ADL found itself on the opposite side of some of the other Jewish groups involved in the *Groff* case.

“I think it’s really a question of balance when it comes to religious liberty cases. We take each one and evaluate it individually,” Levit said. “And in this particular case, we don’t think that this case poses the same kind of Establishment Clause threat as the others that we have perhaps taken a different church-state separation position.”

“Religion is a protected class” under the Civil Rights Act, Levit continued. “So what we’re really talking about here are civil rights

protections. And people of faith are entitled to civil rights protections. And that's distinct from some of the other cases that we've dealt with in other situations."

AJC's Stern explained that "not every religious liberty case is easy," with some including "competing values," such as Establishment Clause concerns.

On this issue, however, "the American Jewish community as a whole has been

unified over the years, and it doesn't have the countervailing arguments that some of those other cases have... This is one that pretty universally affects the Jewish community."

OU's Diamant said he was "very pleased" to see ADL and AJC file briefs in the case.

"Thankfully, opposition to the *Hardison* ruling was a consensus issue across the spectrum of the mainstream Jewish

community," he said. "So it really should really be unifying... Religious liberty has in some cases been a polarizing issue in American law and politics, and this is a case where it should not be and it seems not to be."

Oral arguments in *Groff v. DeJoy* are scheduled for April 18. ♦

MARCH 6, 2023

The Jerusalem rehab center providing community for alcoholics on Purim — and year-round

Jerusalem's AZ House, a kosher shomer Shabbat rehab, provides multi-phase stays and recovery assistance for more than two dozen men

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Purim in Jerusalem can feel like an alternate reality, something out of a dystopian movie. Men dressed in torn marching band uniforms stumble down the street, carrying fallen soldiers over their shoulders, ranting a mumbled language they are inventing as they go. Kids with beards painted on their faces lean against ancient buildings, puffing cigarettes as they watch their dads scream and bounce with bottles in hand as techno music pulses through the air.

It can be a tough day to be a recovering alcoholic.

Many ex-drinkers feel left out, Eric Levitz, the executive director at the AZ House, a kosher *shomer Shabbat* rehab located in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Pisgat Ze'ev, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "There's this underlying [feeling] that all my friends are out there," he explained. "It's a time of year everyone parties hard... There's a lot of glamor and excitement about it."

Before getting sober in April 2012, Levitz

said, "Every day was Purim for me." He entered recovery at the Ed Keating Center in Cleveland, a free nonprofit that serves 150 men and women. Many of the staff at the center aren't licensed professionals, but are recovering alcoholics and addicts themselves. The center's model runs on the belief that someone struggling with addiction is more likely to learn from someone they can empathize with than with a professional who doesn't share their experiences. Three years after graduating from the center, Levitz journeyed to Jerusalem on a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip and fell in love with the country. In Sept. 2016, he launched the AZ House, named after Avraham Zev Olive, who lost his life to the disease in his mid-20s, a men's rehab facility based on the Ed Keating Center model that saved his life.

Today, the organization only has three paid employees — an executive director (Levitz), an assistant director and a director of outreach. Everything else, including group therapy, is run by volunteers. Everyone involved is either in recovery themselves or fluent in the language of Alcoholics

Anonymous and other 12-step programs.

"We don't charge the families," Levitz said. "We don't charge the residents. A kid can show up with a trust fund, he is not to pay... Everything that we do has nothing to do with the dollar sign above [an attendee's] head."

This is a stark change from most other rehabs, which can be so expensive that parents may drain savings accounts and mortgage their houses to pay for the treatment, Gershon Swimmer, a psychotherapist who leads groups at the AZ House, told eJP. "They're so desperate to get their kids sober. They figure, 'If I pay \$10,000 a month, I'm going to get better treatment,' and I don't necessarily think that's correct. The AZ House provides a wonderful ability to help people without breaking the bank."

Israel is not without its share of alcoholism. In a report from 2016, the World Health Organization found that 5.9% of the population had alcohol-use disorder, the clinical term for alcoholism, and 3.3% had alcohol dependence. Out of 100,000 people, 573 died alcohol-related deaths. The *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research*

reported in 2017 that one-fifth of emergency department visitors to a Tel Aviv tertiary care center who were 16-35 years old drank more than four drinks when they drank, and 19% of men and 26% of females drank numerous times a week or every day.

There are plenty of people who need help, and the AZ House seeks to be there when they want it. The program has 27 beds, and attendees go through three phases. The first is the most intense, lasting from two and a half to five months. Days are spent attending groups and AA meetings, getting to know the recovery community that threads throughout Jerusalem. Attendees find a sponsor who guides them through the 12 steps. "They basically go through those three months working together, living together, caring for each other, working on themselves, really growing themselves and taking responsibility for the situation," said Levitz.

During the second phase, attendees secure jobs with the help of staff. They pay rent, about 30% of what it actually costs for them to stay there. "It's more symbolic than it is in regards to covering their costs," Levitz said. "They can go hang out with friends, hang out with family, go to the beach, go to work. They must continue to go to their meetings, continue to meet with their sponsor, and most importantly stay connected to the house and look out for the new guys coming in."

The third phase is optional, with attendees transitioning to independent living and staff helping them find an apartment. The AZ House covers the deposit, cosigns for them and furnishes the place, often with donations.

Most men stay at the AZ house for nine months, but Levitz said they wouldn't put anyone out. "We want to set these guys up for success and we're willing to do whatever it takes to do that. Space, money, any of that stuff, that's not a reason to end someone's treatment period."

The AZ House was founded with a \$50,000 donation from Moshe Zalman Olive, who lost his son, Avraham Zev Olive — whom the program is named after — to the disease. "He helped change all of our lives by getting it started, but he continues to change my life as my friend," said Levitz. Olive's donation covered a fourth of the

annual fees to operate what was then a 15-bed men's recovery house. The rest came from smaller donations. "A thousand dollars here," Levitz said. "Two thousand dollars here. Five hundred dollars there. A food donation there. Building donation there. Someone will pick up our grocery bill. Someone picks up our electric bill. Then another \$5,000. It was month-to-month-to-month for many years."

Today, the program costs about \$10,000 to put one person through; approximately \$300,000 annually. Levitz said they don't receive any government funds because that would restrict who could be hired and increase the overhead to the point that the program could no longer be free. "The way that government funds are given to these types of places is that they give you per person, so now you've incentivized yourself to take the wrong people who don't want to be here."

Instead, donations are received through their website. They've held fundraisers including a concert by Hasidic rapper Nissim Black and a clothing drive. Often donations come in anonymously, from parents and family members who watched children and relatives struggle with the disease. Many watched family members die.

"Me and Brian [Surasky, the assistant director] gave our lives to the first few years of opening this," Levitz said. "We took almost no salary. We had almost no time to ourselves. We each filled the role of three staff members. We operated extraordinarily under budget. We took food donations and clothing donations and furniture donations and toiletry donations."

For the first year and a half, they worked 100-hour weeks. "Then one [ex-attendee] was like, 'I'm gonna send you guys home' and then it started this trend," Levitz recalled. He said that ex-attendees said to him, "We came here for free and it saved our lives, and between all of us we can take this on." Since then, night shifts are covered by volunteers who work one night per week or every 10 days. "At this point, we are indebted to them."

One volunteer, Avraham B. (first name, last initial, as is the rule of 12-step groups), had spent years in and out of rehabs. When addiction stole his brother's life at the beginning of the pandemic, his parents

sent him to yeshiva. "A lot of times you see Jewish parents not really sure what to do," he said, "and they think the religious rabbis might be able to help."

Wine and whiskey are frequent sights on many kiddush tables. But today, it's more common to see grape juice — which is halachically acceptable for Kiddush — presented as an option.

"In the past 25 years or so, the yeshiva community, and the *baal teshuva* community for sure, have become more aware that alcohol and drug abuse are part of their community," said Swimmer, "and they've become more open when somebody has a problem to send them to some sort of therapy or recovery."

When Avraham ran out of drugs, his yeshiva sent him to detox. "From the detox, I wanted to go back to school, even though I was literally a skeleton with no soul," he said. "They said that they will not take responsibility on me [sic] because they don't know what will happen, so they sent me to this place called AZ House. They just told me that it's free. And that was a relief because my parents had been through so much already, trying to get money from this person and that person and the other person just to send me to some fancy rehab."

The AZ House allowed him to focus on his recovery. He mended relationships, learned to give back and connected with a higher power. "It is a spiritual experience that changes us, but I didn't get it in the schools."

Today, Avraham has been sober for a year and a half and credits AZ House with saving his life. "I volunteer and I hang out there because I have friends there. It's kind of like a family."

AZ House is now secure financially and looking at expansion. Levitz said 55% of those who finished the program remain sober. "You can come to a [n AA] meeting in Jerusalem and you can see 30 or 40 [ex-AZ House attendees] sitting there."

For the AZ House community, Purim is a time to help others. "Purim is about giving," Avraham said. "It's about God being in our lives when we don't even see it. There's no doubt in my mind that there was something that kept me alive because I had a lot of friends that did the same things, but just were not fortunate. They died. God was

there when I couldn't be there for myself."

This Purim, Levitz and the AZ House crew plan to hit up events throughout the greater Jerusalem recovery community, including a sober party and *seudah* (festive holiday meal). They are also journeying into

town. He plans to tell attendees, "'There's a party going on, and we don't have to be scared of it. We are spiritually fit, so everyone put on your costumes and we're going to town with the madness.' We're probably the only treatment center that walks into

the demon's den, but we've never had a problem and it's always been a blast. It's the most forbidden thing that a person early in sobriety, let alone a treatment center, can do, and we're like, 'We call the shots. We're going.'" ♦

MARCH 6, 2023

What's so unusual about a Holocaust exhibition in Dubai?

Crossroads of Civilizations Museum founder Al Mansoori was surprised his Holocaust exhibit was the only one in the region outside of Israel

By Ruth Marks Eglash

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

As a child, Ahmed Obaid Al Mansoori was always passionate about history and antiquities, especially those showcasing the myriad of ancient civilizations that make up the Middle East. That might be why he appeared nonplussed when discussing the contents of his Crossroads of Civilizations Museum in Dubai, United Arab Emirates – the only museum in the Arab world with a permanent exhibition of Holocaust and Jewish history on display.

"When I opened the museum in 2014, I did not know that it was one of the only museums in the Arab or Islamic world that had Jewish content," Al Mansoori told *The Circuit* in an interview last week. "There have been Jewish populations in different countries across the region for centuries and I thought surely other countries have something similar, but then I discovered mine was the first permanent gallery about the Holocaust in the region, outside of Israel."

"I really didn't know that I was doing something unusual or different," he said of the exhibition, which was added in June 2021.

Al Mansoori was in Israel last week, his

fourth trip to the country since the signing of the historic Abraham Accords in September 2020, to meet with friends he has made since Israel and the United Arab Emirates normalized diplomatic relations and to view some of the Jewish state's ancient treasures.

Those diplomatic agreements, which also included Bahrain and later Morocco and Sudan, have served to bolster Al Mansoori's eclectic collections and inspire his own museum, which today draws many Israeli tourists curious to see how their history, culture and religion is depicted in the Gulf nation.

"The Jewish religion is part of the Middle East," Al Mansoori said, outlining how a mix of the UAE's traditional values, its unique location in the Gulf, as well as a leadership that encourages tolerance and coexistence, has allowed the country and its citizens to embrace all cultures and religions, in contrast to the tumultuous region that surrounds it.

"We have people coming here from countries and nationalities who hate each other," he explained. "Our policy is, don't bring your problems here; if you are here then you have to respect one another like friends and brothers."

"We see the countries around us making lots of mistakes, we see the extremism and

terrorism," Al Mansoori continued. "[In the UAE] we don't want this; we want financial stability and development."

Located in the Sheikh Hasher Al Maktoum House, Al Mansoori's museum has also been growing and developing rapidly in recent years. Started as a private family collection more than 30 years ago, the rare manuscripts, prints, books, maps and other items were originally held in glass cabinets in Al Mansoori's own home until an event he held caught the eye of the director of the architectural heritage department in the Dubai municipality, who urged him to open the collection to the public.

Today, the collection is spread across three museums – the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum, the Rare Books Manuscripts & Prints Museum and The Armory Museum – and, according to Al Mansoori, each highlights the peaceful meeting of different civilizations that passed through the region and traded or exchanged gifts along the way.

"The museum was not created with professional creators, it is based on my passion," Al Mansoori said. "I'm a collector and when you are a collector, you buy whatever is important for yourself; it has to be linked to your passion."

Al Mansoori talks with passion about

many of the items in his collection: A letter he obtained in 2014 penned by the founder of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl in 1897; an ancient Torah scroll, originally from Czechoslovakia and rescued during Holocaust, that was donated last year to Al Mansoori's collection by the Memorial Scrolls Trust, a London-based foundation.

But it is a copper-bound prayer book containing prayers in three Semitic languages – Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew – and a curtain from the Kaaba, the Great Mosque in Mecca, Islam's holiest site, that Al Mansoori says are closest to his heart.

"When you talk about prayers, you are going very deep, deeper than coexistence, you are talking about harmony," observed Al Mansoori of the prayer book, which he said belonged to a rabbi that once said healing prayers for Muslims during the time of the Prophet Mohammad.

The curtain that once decorated the Ka'aba, said Al Mansoori, was created in 1543 by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, ruler of the Ottoman Empire. Al Mansoori said that Israeli visitors to his museum pointed out that it was Suleiman that built the mosque that sits beside the Western Wall in Jerusalem and that he was the Muslim leader that welcomed Jews to his empire when they were expelled from Spain during Inquisition.

"I was very surprised when my Israeli friends told me that he [Sultan Suleiman] was the one who built the wall [around the Old City] in Jerusalem," he noted. "The Israelis said they liked him because during the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, he welcomed them to the Ottoman Empire."

"That is the beauty of my museum – my visitors teach me a lot," Al Mansoori continued, pointing out that he also

receives visitors from countries that have no diplomatic ties with Israel.

"The reaction of most people is very positive, and not just Emiratis," he said, although there is hesitation from some about viewing the Holocaust exhibit.

"It is a real triumph for me when I see the children from different cultures coming here and knowing that they will leave viewing history differently," said Al Mansoori. "They see things that are linked to them and that makes them feel happy and proud, but they also see the things that are different to them."

"So many museums around the world focus on one group or one race and when you do that you are, by default, telling others that they are less," he concluded. "In this place there is something for everyone and it is a place where everyone feels at home." ♦

MARCH 6, 2023

South African Jews create foundation to bring education tools to underprivileged youth

Education without Borders operates three primary schools in South Africa, with plans to open a high school site

By Daniela Cohen

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Cecil and Ruth Hershler grew up in Cape Town, South Africa, during apartheid, but only awakened to the extent of the injustice around them in their early 20s. It started when they read an article in the *Cape Argus* on Feb. 2, 1972, highlighting the "cramped" and "badly lit" classrooms in the only local Black high school at the time, Fezeka, where instead of proper toilets, students were given a temporary structure of "galvanized iron sheds with pail system toilets."

A *Cape Times* article shortly afterward detailing the 5.2 million South African

and annual increase in government funding — equal to \$298,647.79 today — to build schools for white students brought the disparity home, the Hershlers told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

"It was like a light bulb went off in our heads, and we just said, this can't carry on," Cecil Hershler said. "These two articles, they just blew us away because it was so obvious ... whatever the politicians were saying, that the playing field was completely skewed."

Although he didn't know anyone directly in his family affected by the Holocaust while growing up, Hershler said he has been deeply affected by those stories and what they revealed about the nature of discrimination.

"If you read up on the beginnings of fascism in Germany in the '30s, it all started with small discriminations... similar things to what was happening in apartheid South Africa, which eventually became a total imbalance permanently. We are working with the legacy of that injustice to this very day," said Hershler. "I think this issue of injustice to people, whether you actually are conscious of it or not, as a Jew, it's burned into you."

Today, the Hershlers are the founders of Education without Borders, which supports 400-500 underprivileged youth in South Africa per year through after-school programs in mathematics, science, English and leadership, as well as mentorship

opportunities at schools in disadvantaged communities.

In February 1972, the Hershlers approached the principal at Fezeka High School, Eric Ndadani, to see how they could help. With support from local Jewish businesses, the Cape Town mayor, Robin Friedlander, and R500 from City Hall, the Hershlers told eJP they were able to fix the fence and roof, start a library and build a hall, which the school named after their young daughter, Abby.

Two years later, shortly before emigrating to Canada, the Hershlers heard a knock at the door of their apartment in the Green Point area of Cape Town. Ndadani, Banzi Lubelwana, Fezeka's vice principal, and their wives stood outside bearing gifts. The furniture already gone, the Hershlers sat on the floor with their guests, who blessed them for their coming journey.

"It was the only time we had made true Black friendships," Cecil Hershler said. "We made a promise that we wouldn't forget them."

When they returned to Cape Town 30 years later in 2001, the Hershlers discovered the school had been relocated to the Western Cape township of Gugulethu after it burned down in the Soweto riots. The new school was housed in cardboard portables with holes in the walls, ceiling and floors.

They approached the principal at the time and asked if they could again help. Told that the biggest need was to rebuild the school, the Hershlers returned to Canada, and subsequently created the Education without Borders (EwB) foundation in 2002.

"A lot of our friends in Canada are Jewish, [so] that was the first constituency we appealed to, to our South African friends to come onto the board and help us," said Hershler. "Gradually it's of course become much more diverse, and we're now at least 50/50, non-Jewish and Jewish, working together on the same cause."

Plans to rebuild the school came together faster than anticipated, and the Hershlers decided to take out a second mortgage to be able to continue the process. They then began to organize fundraising activities, starting with the performance of the Athol Fugard play, *Valley Song*, which Cecil acted in, and after six years, paid back the debt while growing their base of EwB supporters.

Today, EwB has branches in South Africa, Canada, Australia and, most recently, the U.S.

"There's one family who came by chance to the original play. The wife is from South Africa, the husband is not, and they were so moved by what we were trying to do that they have remained solid donors for the past 20 years," Hershler told eJP.

A significant portion of EwB's fundraising has come from the South African Film Festival (SAFF), launched in 2011. Run annually by volunteers, SAFF aims to entertain people while educating them about South Africa.

Hershler told eJP that the first festival sold out. "People were standing around the block. And everybody loved the film, 'Skin,'" he said. "We had a little wine and cheese in the foyer. And I couldn't believe so many Black ex-South Africans who had gone into exile were hugging us and crying and saying, 'We had no way to congregare and share stories about our life in South Africa.'"

With the outbreak of COVID in 2020, the Vancouver and Toronto festivals were combined into an online festival streamed across Canada. The festival has now expanded into Australia and the U.S.

The funds raised by EwB to support marginalized youth has grown from CAD \$20,000 in the first year to CAD \$166,000 in 2022, Ruth Hershler told eJP. The past year's total includes revenue from SAFF Canada ticket sales (CAD \$31,000), SAFF Canada sponsorships and corporate donations (CAD \$39,000), individual donations (CAD \$86,000) and a bequest (CAD \$10,000).

After rebuilding Fezeka, EwB began to run after-school programs, prompted by a volunteer Canadian teacher who was working onsite and advised the Hershlers that rather than try to fix the problems within the school system, it would be more beneficial to start a supplementary program for students who wanted to learn.

"It was a great idea to do an after-school tutorial system. But who's going to do it? The teachers are already burned out, they're overloaded. They've just got to try and get through their syllabus. Our learners are so far behind, it's an unwinnable situation for them," said Cecil Hershler. "So, we stumbled on the idea of using students, especially those university and college students, and

graduates from school who have managed to get out of the township and succeed We went to them, and we said, 'This is the way you can help your country. We will pay you a stipend. But more importantly, you're giving back and [even] more importantly, you're giving hope.'"

EwB currently operates in three primary schools in Mfuleni, Bellville South and Gugulethu, and aims to add a high school site.

Natasha October's children, Erin and Reuben, are in fifth and seventh grade, respectively, at Bellville South Primary and have been attending EwB programs for around two years. October told eJP that because sessions cover content the students will later learn in class as well as put them in leadership positions, "it's almost like they're one step forward." She said this has helped her children build self-confidence, and that Reuben has developed his listening skills. She appreciates that the program is free of charge, and it's also enabled her children to participate in extracurricular activities. "I can be proud because Erin can surf now," said October. "For me, it's fun that she is surfing." She said she is also grateful that involvement in the program keeps her children off the streets.

Tassin Williams, a tutor in Bellville, is currently studying to be a teacher for students in the Reception Year, before they enter first grade.

She contacted EwB last August after seeing an advertisement for tutors.

"Sometimes our learners don't have that encouragement, and they don't have that support system. So, EwB actually provides them with that," Williams told eJP. "This is not just education ... it's more than that. It aligned so much with what my mission and vision was because when I was a learner, I longed for something like that."

According to Williams, the one-on-one attention and opportunities for self-reflection that students receive helps them to achieve high grades compared to their peers, and many become "prefects" (student leaders) in grade 7.

Learning to work with kids and other tutors from different backgrounds has also facilitated Williams's personal growth. "Being a tutor at EwB has really pushed me out of my comfort zone and it has

challenged me in a very good way," she said.
"It really builds you up as a person because
you discover so many little things about

yourself that you didn't know, like maybe
you had this skill, and you didn't even know
you had the skill."

For her, EWB is "like a family. You always
feel so welcome and included." ♦